

The Little Pretender

First Encounter:

Edith isn't a stranger when it comes to "accidents". Some are small, insignificant, forgettable. Sometimes, they never get noticed at all, simply forgotten, drifted into the deepest and darkest void of them all.

And yet, among the sea of countless common atrocities, there stood outliers. Events considered as prophetic, real life legends, disasters that only serve to destroy what was built on these lands.

History often repeats itself. Many consider it as a never ending cycle of repetition of little differences of the past. Quite a mouthful, yet none have proven it false ever since the beginning of time.

These lands has raised countless lives, it has consumed many more into itself. Yet it too had more to give.

From beneath the soil, liquid of dark oozes across its dirt and grass. A pit that swallows light into oblivion.

Creatures of unknown origin, of nightmare and terror crawled out of that hell gate, laying their waste, tainting this world ever since the primal ages.

And yet there it was. So different from what I have read. So different from what I have heard. Everything about it was nothing close to similar to the creatures mentioned by any mean in this world.

The way it stared at a little bunny sitting next to it. It almost seem like the both of them were mimicking each other.

The little fluffy creature wasn't scared at all. It was calmly nibbling on grass as small drops of darkness lay on its pale impermeable fur coat.

The shadow thing started to consume grass as well, to some degree of success. It seem to be thinking that it was a rabbit. Perhaps it was pretending to be a rabbit. Whatever the case, it was no different the creature in question.

I approached it, step by step, as slowly as I managed to be.

With its heightened sense of hearing, the rabbit was alerted. It acted startled from my presence and swiftly made a run for it, hopping away with haste.

But it was fine, according to one of my many assumptions, the little shadow being wasn't simply mimicking the rabbit. But instead, I guessed the nature of it.

It was as if I stared longingly into a mirror. Even though it stared at me, unmoving. What I saw was myself staring at me, unmoving.

"How curious"

I spoke out of habit, perhaps not even my own as I kneel down a few steps away from it. In return, it started approaching me with its small feet.

Like the rabbit that got away, this thing hopped nearer to me and tried familiarizing with my smell.

I gave it a hand, up onto my shoulder as I sat down, disturbing the grass below. The little thing sat firmly, its body felt cold and almost identical to jelly.

It was no doubt a denizen of the hell beneath. But this one is special.

Time flew by during my stay in that forest, night eventually fell onto my surroundings. The creature too dimmed out. If it wasn't for the feeling on my shoulder, I would never think I was here with another being.

Survival skills are important. Warmth is the most important thing to keep during a prolonged outdoor stay.

The small campfire I set up has kept the scenery around me bright and clear. The creature at that time hopped down from my shoulder and started hopping around the dancing flame.

With its small and soft frame, the creature began standing on its back legs, wiggling to the flickering of the campfire.

I sat with my back against the body of a large birch nearby, observing its behaviour as the night went on.

When it was no longer interested in the movements of the flame, the thing sat back down. But this time, it stared at me. Its sitting position was vaguely like me, even though it kept falling over from the shape of the body.

Despite difficulties, it kept going at it without resting. Until it could consistently sit for long duration at a time.

At that moment, it was abundantly clear that I have replaced that rabbit in its mind. The subject of imitation was now me.

But that was also why I couldn't let that slide

Before my eyes was a child, an impressionable little soul that needs guidance.

Children are blank canvas, white sheets of paper. They are empty sponges that yearn to soak up anything that comes into view. Young souls who grew up in the jungle often become like animals. Others who grow up with tender love and care from others of their kind become like those who grew up before them.

Adaption is nature for all, no matter how little of importance it might be to some.

I won't let it become empty like me.

A Cold Morning:

Eventually, the air felt colder and colder, the little campfire from the night prior has completely burned out. Morning breeze washes over me as I slowly awaken from my brief slumber.

The first thing I saw was a foggy scene, with not so many trees visible before me.

Laying beside the ashes surrounded by rocks was the little creature, still fast asleep, slightly moving from an unfinished dream.

Easing my upper body forward, I took a bit of momentum and got up to my feet. A rustling of the decaying leaves from where I was stepping thankfully did not disturb its sleep.

That aside, the feeling of several lifeforms I felt when entering this forest for the first time are still lingering around. Fixing my gaze at the closest one, I embarked on a morning walk in its direction.

The early haze left everything around me no different than an unknown land, giving my surroundings a mystical feeling. A part of me that I learned would feel rather happy to encounter a scene like this, perhaps even able to bunker down for the morning and write a decent amount of pages. After all, what part "Dew Shower" make any sense if this kind of scene doesn't get placed at the start.

A sense of authenticity is nice to see.

The chirps of the early birds began echoing from afar, the misty layer being slowly pushed back as the scenic view comes into sight ever so clearer. Time is passing as it always does. I count the seconds passes as I take each step of mine.

The almost silent melody constantly ringing by my ears, the wind deliver such lovely tunes. Every morning, every noon, every night. The forest truly never stop singing.

Every place has its own way of communication. Some in songs, other with bustling atmospheres. While many more speak with its residents in

a wordless way.

As I stepped further and further away from the camp spot last night, I noticed the grass ahead appear less and less green. A scent of decay is filling the air in place of that morning dew. The warming air contribute to exposing this feeling.

My temporary halt quickly come to an end, my legs continue moving along the original path I had set out to tread down.

The deeper I went, the heavier this scent became. The source of this strangeness began revealing itself to my own eyes.

Dead grass, dried trees, everywhere within view in front of me were raked across by large and small sable marks. Everything caught in them are seemingly missing from all of my sense.

Light does not reflect off of them any longer, nor can I feel or smell them at all.

They are as good as erased from the face of existence.

And in the center of it all, what presented itself before my eyes deeply riled my curiosity.

Many black marks weren't like the rest, they didn't simply remain flat on the surfaces they passed through.

But instead, wearing animal skulls, they were like living beings, grouping together almost no different than a cult. Some kneels, other stood, the rest hung around on different levels of height, the sky was not an exception.

Their gaze were all deeply fixed on a lone person laying on top of that darkness. I can feel it still, their life has yet to be taken by those things.

I found no interest in these empty creatures, their existence might well have been empty air to me.

A few steps across this horrid scenery got me right before the dying soul,

a little girl whose vitality has yet to completely slip away.

"Hello little one, may I know your name?"

I asked her, kneeling down beside her shaking body. With my bare hands, I brushed the dark pieces off from her silky white hair, turning her face up to look at me.

Her eyelids were swollen, her irises crackled from their core, forever sealing her sight in an empty void.

I lay her head on my lap, feeling her weak breath moving her body slightly. She was drifting away, she knew that once she fall asleep, all of this pain will spare her.

I smiled at her, gently passing my fingers through her decaying strands of silk. Much of it has fallen off, exposing her terribly scarred scalp.

Internally, I hazarded a guess as I held her delicate arm, slowly rolling down her dirty shirt sleeve.

Unsurprisingly, her skin has been deeply scarred not with wounds, but with imprints from a deep and painful sickness.

"It seems you have it much worse than others. How unfortunate..."

My comment about her state of being caused her to smile. A strange behaviour, but a behaviour I'm not unfamiliar with.

There is often a sense of relief knowing that death is approaching. The final wave of torment is near, and soon she can rest for eternity.

Her vocal cord seem to have been badly damaged, to the point where sound could no longer be formed. What a pity, I would have loved to hear her voice.

Her eyes though swollen, were opened with tears. I know she could not see me, but she could still feel me. Trembling, her left arm reach towards me, fingers spread, trying to get a hold of me.

Seeing that, the skull wearing creatures around us approaches.

But halted right away. Her life is still here, lingering with such brute force that it kept them still.

I put my hand on her palm, knitting my fingers with hers. Her response was simply closing her hand on mine. She felt cold, all over. She was scared still.

"I'm sure heaven will welcome you, little one. Only peace awaits. Let go of your pain, don't be scared, everything will be alright..."

With the last of my whispers, she grip my hand tighter. Exerting her last bit of strength, she forced her upper body towards my gaze. Resulting in her falling onto my body, panting and trembling harder.

I held her lightly, letting her feel a final moment of comfort before the end.

Slipping away as she breathed, she mouthed one final message to me. Her trembling slow down, her chest puff up less regularly. Until her hand left mine, falling onto the darkness below.

The dark which has been surrounding her all this time, began pooling onto her.

I let her lay down, tugging her hands neatly together. Her eyes now close, tears no longer stain her face. A sleeping princess, who will never wake up.

As I backed away from her, the creatures surround her in a tight circle. Their liquid like body transformed, almost like they were mutating. Their grotesque bodies rip and tear at the ground before them, a ferocious and savage feast.

I turn away, there is nothing left for me to do here. I have gotten all that I need.

I held my camera close to my chest, staring into the lens. I can see someone stare back at me. She is incomplete still, but she was more than enough.

The Day Resume:

The green eventually returned to my view, the stench filled air no longer haunt my surroundings. What a shame, I was about to look for the remaining sources as well.

Unfortunately, they have all disappeared from my senses. Though naturally, those were much weaker in signal. Perhaps they were already too far away for me to reasonably approach them.

I did notice the trail of death left behind by the girl. To the west of where I found her.

After making that mental note, I came back to the campsite. Though only making it half way before I saw the little darkness running towards me.

While it still resemble a rabbit, it was sprinting at me on its hind legs.

Having already put my camera away, I kneel down and catch the little thing into a hold with my hands. Its body wiggles, seeping out a bit from the gaps between my fingers.

It would be fine if our interactions stay brief.

I let it sit on my shoulder and turn my back away from the direction I was facing. There was no point in returning to the campsite.

As that thought filled my head for the brief second, lingering momentarily on mind, I began stepping forward, away from our original spot. At the same time purposefully avoiding the stench of distant death.

With no more reason, I trekked down the dirt path on the opposite side of everything. Only seeing trees and birds before completely exiting the forest. It's an appropriate time for an education.

Various places on my mind without any distinction, it would be rather difficult to know where to go.

Requirements are easily known. A place with people, communities, oppositions and agreements would be desirable. A diverse environment

suitable for growth in all directions.

Where oh where.

By sea or land.

"This world is still a vast unknown. What do you think, little one?"

My question almost seemed to have fallen on deaf ears. Two sentient beings on completely different realms on consciousness.

I waited, as it processed my sound. Looking puzzled, not knowing why. Little stimuli in its mind causing it to think for the first time. Perhaps unlike the way I do, but it thought nonetheless.

And the answer it gave me was not the audible kind. But a simple directional guiding gesture.

A single point up North. Perhaps it too sensed an exciting path ahead.

It was wonderful. It may come to forget this moment, but it would be understandable. After all, not all remember their childhood, let alone their first moment of true consciousness.

A truly special moment worthy of a forever existing memento.

With the long journey ahead, I glanced down at my hand out of recent habit. With the sight of the dark purple stone on my pinkie finger, I was reminded of my own journey.

Thank you miss Isen. It is a truly wonderful gift.

A Flash In Time:

"For your hard work."

Tossing a few coins to the horse rider, I tip my hat at him as he went on his merry way.

"Good day."

"How much for a room?"

With an endearing smile, I requested to rent out a little place to stay in this bustling town.

The receptionist suggested many types of prices of different rooms.

"A small place, for one."

To stay every night, 10 Dinaire was rather cheap. With the keys on the doorknob still, I lay down my luggage near the wooden bed in the corner of the room.

The window there showed a decent view. I could see the market further down the road. Peculiar folks running up and down that dirt path.

The little box I brought with me began to move. The first tap, comes the second, then a third that open the lid. A deep dark poke its body out, peeking at me from the box's shadow.

I paid it no mind, it would eventually leave the box and wander the floor on its own.

Though it was aware enough to know not to wander outside of the door. I wonder why it stopped. There were certainly people in the hallway, the mundane conversations between neighbors and roommates. Perhaps

even strangers meeting each other for the first time.

I listened, while scrolling through the lens of my camera. The pictures were in perfect condition. All were clear, detailed, real...

"Hello there"

I spoke to the little girl sitting on my room's floor. She on the other hand seemed at a loss for words. As they all were.

"Do you feel any pain?"

My question met with a confused head shake. Despite that answer, the girl started trembling. Perhaps that lingering sensation pursues her even then, a phantom pain that tortures the mind.

I kneel on the floor near her, reaching my hand out in her view and range. She looked at me, pausing the shakes for brief moment. I do not speak, I simply observed.

My warm smile remained, for as long as it took. The little darkness stared at the two of us, understandably puzzled. I kept my gaze fixed on her, as she does the same to me in return.

In that moment, though emotionally I was someone else, in image I was my truest self.

Children aren't quick to judge.

With both her hands, the little girl reached out to mine. Her clearly damaged fingers though painless were still hard to look at. Her rough skin felt clear against my fingers. Shaking still, yet calmer. I don't have to worry as much with her.

Lifting my other hand up, I gently pat the back of her hands which were both facing up. Feeling more that rugged texture, her skin pulled back and folded onto each other. Almost akin to sandpaper.

"Do you feel any pain?"

Hearing the same question again, she was a little confused, however less so than before. Her shaking too eventually ceased, signaling the appropriate timing. A scent of sweetness passes by my nose.

I observe quietly, for her to eventually notice that same smell. Her eyes briefly darted to my right, where the sweet aroma came from.

"I brought some sweet bread with me, do you want some?"

I asked, offering her something of my own. To which she remained skeptical, though only for a moment before deciding to nod. A choice made by her and no one else.

With many small bites, the child chewed carefully on the piece of bread in her hold. She sit on the much comfier surface of the mattress, letting me brush her pointy hair. Though they were soft, they were also bent in many directions, giving them the spiky shape.

After a few strokes, I noticed quite a bit is stuck on the comb. Her scalp is still badly damaged, the red rashes though causing no more are still very much a nuisance.

The little creature creep up behind me, it flopped its squishy body on my back, briefly staining my shirt with its darkness.

It seemed safe to touch, that thought led me to bring it and let it sit on the girl's lap.

She let out an almost silent shriek, but quickly calm as she felt no harm from the creature. It as well looked up at her, its lightly glowing eyes met with hers.

Though there were no panic nor fear, the girl was somewhat still, not knowing what to do regarding the strange being that was put onto her. All while it reaches its little nubs for arms up and try to grab the bread, wanting a bite as well.

I left the bed for the both of them, taking a few steps towards the other door within the room. It was made of wood, slightly darker than the walls and floor for easy recognition. I could smell a floral scent from seeping out from the little cracks before me. Perhaps it does have what I needed.

My assumption was indeed reinforced upon opening that door.

However, it was far from perfect.

I walk inside, carefully closing the door behind, hearing a quiet creak then return to silence.

As I stare down the rotting corpse stuck in the toilet area. Sunken as if it was in the process of being swallowed. What little blood could see have dried out, but more importantly, there were bubbles everywhere.

Many bottles of pinkish liquid were laying on the still wet floor. The floral scent is stronger than before. Much too strong for the stench of rot.

A closer look shows cuts on the bottles, jagged, caused by either a rusty blade or something with edges. It was rough, uneven, no different than an aftermath of a beast attack.

The body too was quite difficult to stare at.

I crouched down, getting pass the comfy smelling air, prolong breathing has made it quite suffocating rather than pleasant. No sign of decomposition, almost seemed like they've died the moment I walked in.

I stared longer, taking in every feature from the lifeless body.

"Blue hair, slightly blended with a touch of silver. Lashes and pupils of the same colors, right eye ruptured from hard head impact. Dried blood from the mouth, nostrils and ears. Left eye is completely unharmed."

All of the information I gathered belonged to a young boy, around 13 to 15 years old.

"Blink if you are still alive."

I whispered, my words seemingly fell on deaf ears. It would be natural if the kid was no longer here in spirit.

However, his remaining eye still glistens, reflecting lights on its surface.

"Wonderful. I hope you three will get along well."

My Strange Neighbor:

"wake up!! You're gonna be late for work!"

Despite the effort of an unbelievably stunning young girl, the older woman refuses to budge from her nightly slumber. Would be real nice every morning doesn't start with excessive yelling, Im sure the neighbors are sick of it too...

"Gee get up alreadyyyy!, don't you got an important day today??"

I continued, my plead were basically heard by no one. How irritating. Alright, guess I'll really have to use brute force.

I swiftly exit the bedroom just to immediately return with various items in hand. A feather, a bucket of water and a brick.

I understand that these are vastly different extremities, but I promise it isn't excessive. I can't tell you how many times I had to wash the same bloody construction material.

Naturally, I tried using the feather, for tickling of course. Wiggling it at her nose, feet, neck, back and so on. She would just groan a bit then go right back to sleep.

"Alright, you asked for this..."

With that sentence completed, my hands then placed firmly on the bucket on my right, lifting it up from the floor.

"Take th-ehh!?"

She fell off the bed and took me by surprise, the bucket fell from my grasp and dived head first into the wall. Somehow falling down to the floor again without any watery mess.

"huh..."

I look down at the still sleeping grown woman at my feet. Her face stained with some dust from her bedroom floor, she never sweep this place it's filthy. And that bliss, what kind of dream is she having!? Stop

smiling at me like that!!

